



Plenary General Council

Saint-Lambert-des-Bois, June, 2014

Number 6

Halfway along

The sixth meeting of the PGC will have been central in the true sense of the word, insofar as it was situated between two General Chapters. In the middle of the river ford, we measure the distance travelled, we feel the strength of the Spirit as that of a strong current and we answer the challenge that we have before us to reach without hindrance the other shore. Saint-Lambert-des-Bois, that green area in a marvelous site of the valley of the Chevreuse will have been the ideal place to check out the road travelled since 2011 and better understand that which separates us still from the Chapter of 2017.

The recent European reconfiguration of the Congregation reduced the PGC by two members. That must not reduce its role as a place of re-creation "where we listen to each other" as Father General remarked on this eve of the Pentecost. In a world that suffers from a serious endemic failure to listen, "our structures aim at the building of the Kingdom where each one has his place and his complementary role to play," he also recalled in denouncing "the three scourges that impede our march forward: the individualism of the religious, the lack of interiority, and the lack of the sense of consecrated religious life."

Also, we will never do enough for vocations, their reception, their formation and their companionship. More than ever we must pray everywhere, the Master to send workers to his fields ready to harvest. No effort must be spared for that; everywhere we are posted we must become callers. How can we face also the lack of well-prepared leaders, if not in turning our back on all forms of mediocrity and in pushing ourselves continually on the mission paths?

Despite our financial and human frailties, the internationalization is progressing and we rediscover the pertinence of poverty lived practically by a better management of our goods and the progress of self-sufficiency. Everywhere we seek confusedly to quench the thirst of a return to our spiritual roots as the promising prelude to this Year of Consecrated Life that will soon open.

BLL

Greenery at the doors of Paris

The valley of the Chevreuse, at the doors of Paris, still retains its secret and game-filled forests and offers an area propitious for silence and peaceful contemplation. The domain of Saint-Lambert-des-Bois is situated, right near the ancient Abbey of Port Royal, razed by the Sun King because it was the center of Jansenism.

The church of Saint Lambert, situated downwards from a forest of a few hectares, dates from the 13th century and quite quickly attracted pilgrims who came to venerate Our Lady of Life. It is significant that the PGC, the first after the creation of the Province of Europe, was able to meet there.

Over the porch of this rustic church these words are inscribed: "When you will be gathered in my name, I will be among you", words that find a profound echo in the preoccupations of the Congregation that wants to grow as a body and always embody more a profound unity.

In the 1960's the Benedictines of Ligugé founded a Priory here. Almost ten years ago, a small Assumptionist community relayed them while also taking on the parish animation in this sector of the diocese of Versailles. St. Benedict Priory and its chapel dominate this jewel of greenery.

The whole has also a well-furnished welcome center that is associated with that of Valpré to host business seminars in the heart of the forest.



The two new provinces



The birth of Europe

The presentation of the new Province of Europe could not pass unnoticed. A few days after the European elections that had been marked by the rise of populisms and in which the top party was that of the abstainers and of moroseness. A question imposed itself: how could the birth of the Assumptionist Europe get through the turbulences of such a context. In these Pentecost days of the PGC, only the Spirit can renew us, give us new hope and grow the Kingdom. In all that confidence is required, with the certitude that salvation does not come from us but from Him.

At the time of its birth, the Province of Europe has 341 religious: 79 Brothers and 262 priests with 25 different nationalities. 175 religious are older than 70 and 64 younger than 40 years-old. Today the Province has 52 communities in 18 countries with 105 young religious still in formation. It is a simple photo but the statistics that can give ideas often hide the essential aspects and the structural changes cannot alone give answers to all our preoccupations. The

transformation of Christianity hovers like a worrisome shadow on the Old Continent and in other places. Secularization, indifference, individualism, and agnosticism have, here and there, reduced Christianity to shagreen. As Emile Poulat underscored a few years ago: "That which dies is always more visible than what is being born." The Province of Europe has resolutely adopted hope as its first Chapter wanted to show: its animation turned to the understanding of faith, the continuance of ecumenism, to the solidarity with the poor, the openness of the communities to the young and to vocations. Fraternal attention to those who are ageing could not be forgotten.

And to prepare for tomorrow, collaboration with the laity of the Alliance is to be lived as a springboard which will allow many areas to rebound and prepare the future. This new creation of the Province of Europe is without a doubt but one stage in our restructuration and many questions have not yet found an answer. For example, the question of the realities outside of Europe attached to it has not been resolved. What are the resources, human and material? What apostolic body do we want to grow? Those questions, and many others, were at the center of the reflections of this first PGC after the inauguration of the Province of Europe.

The Statutes of the two new Provinces are adopted

The Superior General in his PGC has ratified the Statutes of the Province of Europe. The modifications made (art. 20 in relation to the RV 61; art. 33 is added and 34) do not change its

philosophy. For the Province of Madagascar, the Superior General has also ratified its new Statutes adopted at the Provincial Chapter of December 2013.

Madagascar

The joys and sorrows of a birth

The Province of Madagascar saw the light of day on the feast of Christmas 2013 for the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the first Assumptionists in the Big Island. This birth coincides also with a moment of profound social and political transformation for the population. Madagascar has just lived through democratic elections as an exceptional time in its history. Hery Rajaonarimampianina has become the new President. In Madagascar, half the population of more than 22 million inhabitants is Christian (20% Catholic and 30% Protestant).

On December 31, 2013, the young Province of Madagascar had 66 religious, 34 priests and 32 brothers. It has welcomed 3 Congolese and 2 Togolese. Five Frenchmen among the elders still participate in the mission. The vocations are numerous but the socio-political, economic, cultural and ecclesial context does not favor the authentic witness of religious life. Recruiting requires a good discernment and the development of the Assumption must be accompanied by a good formation and a serious spiritual companionship on all levels and at all stages of religious life.

The death of Father Charles Razafinanantsoa on his return from France after a period of healthcare and recycling has been for the whole Province a painful trial as well as the health problems of Fr. Thierry Randrianarison, the new Provincial Treasurer. The mobilizing work of the Province is the bush schools network. Last year the college celebrated its



10th anniversary and the network its 25th. Today it has more than thirty little schools. The college is building to enlarge its capacity and the network has acquired a vehicle for travel between the

schools. The team of religious devoted to this apostolate is being renewed and as a small oversight committee has been instituted, the administration of the work will be given to a lay person.

Focus on the Auberge Adveniat

In the beginning it was a question of placing a hostel in a religious space. Today it is a question of how to place a community in a hostel. There are many “passers” who during their second stay realize that it is a really particular meeting place.

In this very mobile word, Adveniat becomes a place of reference that can permit a fruitful apostolate. Installed on rue François Ier, the Christian youth hostel Adveniat is presented to the PGC by Father Arnaud Alibert, a priest from Montpellier who entered the Assumption in 2008.

This mobilizing work proposes a specific welcoming place in the heart of Paris. It is an historic place for the Assumption that, while affirming its Christian identity, seeks to help visitors discover the whole Paris and propose a place of conviviality. It also has a home for a dozen students and a community space for four or five religious who live with three or four students looking to discover religious life.

There are 27 rooms on three floors that furnished 20,833 nights in 2013. The immediate success of the hostel quickly required professionalism. The ground floor offers an animation that fosters meetings and lends itself to lay-religious collaboration and also with friends and neighbors.

The hostel is primarily for those who are interested in the area (23% of the hosts are Koreans) and those who are there to meet (tourists, professionals, Parisians of the Catholic network). This polyglot community is a place that offers an occasion for Assumptionist volunteers. Its administration is to be given to a lay person of the Alliance, Jeff Tremblay. The work also fosters a good collaboration with the Sisters of the Assumption family. The success of the project is based on a community of friends. It is difficult to measure the vocational impact in just four years. Its extension will bear fruit in the longer term. It is a wager that mobilizes religious and lay persons committed to it.



The Eastern European Mission

25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is time to understand better our presence in the Eastern European Mission, and especially our implication in the Eastern Rite. That was the reflection taken up during this PGC. What is the significance today of the presence of the Assumption in the territories where Orthodoxy or Islam dominate? Can we still answer the challenges? Certainly the passion for the Christian East animates the Assumption since its beginnings. The present day publication of the correspondence of Fr. Galabert allows it to re-appropriate its oriental tradition. Why allow Fr. Daniel Gillier to deepen his reflection on it as he was invited to give us the point of view of the man on the spot so that we might work in a more targeted way our ecumenical commitment in fidelity to the Eastern ambition of Fr. d'Alzon? At present Father Daniel is one of the three members of the community of Plovdiv. He has been there for 20 years. We work with our Oblate Sisters. The community serves 3 small Byzantine Rite parishes, that of the city of Kuklen and Pokrovan. It also serves as a home for 6 students from a nearby rural area. This presence in the service of a minority community today sees its ecumenical ambitions hurt by the closing of dialogue manifested by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The relations with Orthodox priests have become quite rare. The prospects of vocations have become weak for various reasons. Since the re-foundation of the presence of the Oblates and the Assumptionists in 1993-1994 after the fall of the communist regime a very close collaboration between brothers and sisters has been established to the point that



each community cannot see its presence and its mission without the other community.

To our presence in this area is added another symbolic dimension that we cannot ignore. It is not only the oldest of all the existing Assumptionist missions but it was also desired by Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon himself in response to a call from Pope Pius IX during an audience of June 1862. It was for that mission, in response to a request by Fr. Galabert that Fr. d'Alzon founded the Oblate Missionaries of the Assumption in 1865. Finally Plovdiv is the privileged center in memory of our three blessed brother Bulgarian martyrs (Fathers Josaphat Chichkov, Kamen Vitchev, and Pavel Djidjov), the first declared Blessed of our religious family. The community of Plovdiv is the only community of the Congregation to live and celebrate in the Byzantine Rite. For almost ten years the community has not received reinforcements. That is becoming urgent. A discernment needs to take place post haste. The question is today clearly posed.

The Assumption and the Oriental Rite

To reflect on our presence in the rite, Father Jean-Paul Périer had been solicited. The transport strikes in France kept Father Jean-Paul in Lyons far from Saint Lambert. We know that his keeping company with Fr. Galabert by publishing at present the entirety of his letters constitutes a precious help for us to understand yesterday and prepare tomorrow. Galabert had always anchored himself in the service of the Unity of the Church with the Latin Vicariate as well as that of the Slavic Rite. He was guided by the maxim according to which: "The Assumptionist missionary will do everything to prove that the Catholic Church venerates and loves, with respect of the Latin Rite, the centuries-old Liturgies of the Orient, and want to integrally maintain these precious symbols of the race in the religious domain."

Rome opened the way for the Oriental Rite in the Assumption in two ways in 1882 in authorizing the Congregation to open public chapels at its schools and in 1883, when Brother Jacques Chilier became the first Assumptionist to adopt the Slavic Rite.

A decisive step was taken when in 1895 the Assumption opened an oriental seminary in Chalcedon. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 hope was reborn in the East, but men with a solid and serious preparation were lacking. The accords of Balamand seem also to indicate a reflux of the Uniate effort. Oriental Christians of all rites, torn apart in general and desirous of exodus, are hurt by a radicalizing political Islam. On all points the future is uncertain. The Christians of Oriental traditions are diminishing in numbers in many Eastern countries, the Rites continue.



The Presentation of the Oblates: challenges and priorities How to go further together

On Saturday, June 14, Father General and the PGC welcomed Sister Felicia, Superior General of the Oblates for three years. Rumanian, who began her formation clandestinely, she has been Mistress of Novices and Provincial of Rumania and knows well the Eastern Mission from which she comes. Passionately a daughter of Father d'Alzon, she was associated with the first letter to the Congregation by Father Benoît Grière. This meeting aimed above all at answering the following question: how do we go forward in our discernment on the Eastern European Mission, a reflection begun on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Mission (2012) and that of the foundation of the Oblates (2018). We are associated with the Mission of the Oblates except in Athens. We cannot therefore dissociate our discernment from theirs, or not act in accord and in communion together.

The Superior General of the Oblates sought to describe to us the configuration of the ten Oblate communities present in the five

countries of the Mission that have as objective to work for unity in the spirit of Vatican II in the contrasting realities of Orthodox and Muslim lands and in Israel, the birthplace of the three great monotheistic religions.

It is important that this reality be shared between the two congregations. In 2005 it became a priority for the whole of the Congregation, and in 2011 it was honored for its jubilee.

Bulgaria was the birthplace of this mission and remains always the exemplar of this collaboration between AA and OA in Plovdiv. After having enumerated the numerous initiatives taken on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Eastern Mission, Sister Felicia wanted to share certain of her convictions for reinforcing the commitment to the East, land of the origins of the mission of the Oblates through the international composition of the communities and re-vivifying the passion for unity on all levels of formation.

Sister Felicia recalled the hopes

expressed at the time of the jubilee, namely: intensify the partnership between the Augustinians and the Oblates of the Assumption; permanently resourcing ourselves in the great tradition of the East and making it known around us, developing dialogue among all; intensifying our roots in the local Churches and our openness to the populations of foreign origin; developing links between communities and deepening the meaning and range of our presence in the Eastern Rite.

“The ecumenical commitment of the mission must stimulate the whole of the congregation. We must be a symbol of unity by the witness of our brotherliness,” concluded Sister Felicia. “It is a question of working in our communities to reinforce spiritual life and communion. Ecumenism begins at home, said Fr. Hervé Stéphan, Finding again the passion of the founding figures of our origins, whose specific traits can inspire and stimulate us. Mutual support is essential. We still have a ways to go together.”

The path of the Alliance

A significant step: The Way of Life adopted

The text that was adopted by the PGC was the ending of a long gestation. After the Chapter of 2011, the International Commission of Lay-Religious for the lay Assumptionists got to work under the guidance of Fr. Marcelo Marciel, Assistant General, as requested by the Chapter (144). A first meeting took place in Rome in July 2012 and entrusted the work of synthesizing the five existing documents to a commission of wise people charged with doing the revision. All the provinces were then asked to present their

observations. In September 2013 the meeting of the international commission that took place in Madrid reviewed the synthesis enlightened by the remarks that had been made to them. In December 2013, having arrived at its fourth grinding, the text was translated in three languages: French, English and Spanish. The document has five chapters and represents the result of three years of work. Another meeting will take place from October 26 to 30, 2014 in Florence, Italy and another for the Hispano-American part of the Alliance will take

place November 17-23, 2014 in Bogota (Colombia). Today the cost of this work is completely covered by the General House but certain provinces pay for certain travels of lay people. The civil statutes of the Lay Alliance of France and Africa have received the approbation of the PCG. Now we are trying to go forward to a Canonical recognition by the Roman Congregation for Religious. But from now on, a source-text, a sort of Instrumentum Laboris will allow us to go further. The next stage will settle the formation programs.

Decision: The PGC of June 2015 in Nairobi

Among the decisions adopted at the 6th meeting of the Plenary General Council decided that its session of June 2015 will be held in Nairobi (Kenya) from the 11th to the 20th of June. This choice manifests the attention that the whole congregation has for the Province of Africa and in particular for this region constituted by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. This region has seen important foundations these last few years. It has an international house of formation in the English language and wants to increase its efforts in the area of vocation ministry. Also, in the middle of this Year of Consecrated Life, July 9-24, the Inter-Assumption session on formation to discuss the spirit of our Assumptionist Family and the elements of formation for the Church and the world, will take place in Nairobi.



The Solidarity Campaign 2015

The last two annual solidarity campaigns were fruitful. Today it goes on cruising speed. The turbine for the Palmba is being completed. The Eugenopolis (Brazil) project is 50% financed. We must choose a new project for the next solidarity campaign. The proposition adopted by the PGC is a project



that had not yet found the means to be realized: it is a semi-industrial chicken farm to fund the Kinshasa community. \$20,000 are needed to finance the initiative. The small production of eggs and chickens would be on the land at Bibua where the house for the new postulate of the Kinshasa region.

Justice and Peace

The PGC of December 2013 had been marked by the invitation of Sister Franca Sessa (LSA) former missionary in Brazil and coordinator of the International Secretariat of Justice and Peace and Integrity of the Creation. The General Chapter had recommended to the Plenary General Council to consider the participation of the Congregation in the International Commission “Justice and Peace of the Assumption Family” (Acts of the 2011 Chapter, no. 58 {2}). This meeting then had a particular import for a greater commitment of the Congregation. Sister Franca had explained to the Council the origins and the reasons for the Secretariat’s existence.

It is a way of better understanding the social phenomena and favor its coherence without religious, biblical and theological approach, and on the ground, searching for solutions and permit the development of solidarity and the promotion of humanity. It is a question of underscoring the important aspects of our mission with its successes and failures. The exchange had allowed us to see how important it is in today’s Assumption to mutually coordinate our means.

The PGC gave a favorable judgment on asking the Superior General of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, Sister Marie-Françoise Phelippeau allow the participation of the Augustinians of the Assumption in the International Commission “Justice and Peace of the Assumption Family.”

Meeting with the religious and people of The Lay Alliance of the Paris region

It was a happy parenthesis that gave a breath of fresh air to the work of the PGC. The meeting between religious and lay people of the Paris region with the PGC was the occasion to refresh our fraternity of proximity.



The first apostolic nominations

Father General in his PGC made the first apostolic nominations of :

- Ronald SIBUGAN (Province of North America – Philippines)
- Pierre NGUYEN VAN HIEU (Province of Europe)
- Jean-Claude KAKULE KAMABU (Province of Europe)
- Régis GROSPERRIN (Province of Europe)
- Jean-Marie KAKULE MBOKANI (Province of Africa)
- Wellington BARBOSA DIAS (Province of Brazil)

Father General's Conclusions



At the end of the 6th PGC, Father General concluded these 10 days of intense work by showing his satisfaction for the work accomplished but also with the regret of having just skimmed the surface “of subjects that would deserve more time and discernment.” “From now on,” he stated, “a better consciousness of solidarity and decision making is developing.”

As far as the **Eastern European Mission** is concerned, a question is asked today: “Our implication in the Oriental Rite attains its limit and we must make decisions. Can we answer all the challenges we face?”

At the half-way point, the Council examined what the **2011 General Chapter** asked of it. A great amount of work has been done but there remain dossiers that are lagging and that the efforts must be pursued. Next December the themes of the Chapter of 2017 will be

determined and the communities will be invited to work on the Acts of the Chapter to do their part.

For the **formation** that remains a priority, the formation sessions for the formators and the masters of novices have taken place in Rome. But vigilance must not be relaxed for “a certain number of communities that do not fulfill the minimal conditions of Assumptionist life whether in the domain of conviviality or the life of prayer.” Father General asked that “each Provincial act vigorously to give anew all its place to the Rule of Life! A year of rediscovering and deepening the Rule of Life should coincide for us with the Year of Consecrated Life. Why not decree it?” “Points of breakage in our community and religious life must serve as alarms,” continued Fr. Benoît, “and we cannot give in to indolence, passivity and mediocrity... Let us react!”

In countries where there are **vocations**, we must make a more sustained effort: “Next year there will be novices in Sokodé, Tuléar, Manila, Juvisy, Ba Ria, and Butembo. We await with hope the opening of a Latin-American novitiate for 2016. The reinforcement of our efforts in the vocation ministry must be intensified... We will not practice “birth control”, even if we must do prudent discernment,” asserted Fr. Benoît.

The **Congress on Education** in the Assumption is in

preparation and should be held at Assumption College in July 2016 as well as the session Inter-Assumption for the formators that will be held from the 10th to the 24th of July 2015 in Nairobi. These two meetings are important for the animation of key sectors of our mission.

The **Lay-Religious Alliance** continues on its way, “a way of life” that has been adopted as a “reference text” a “source text” that will allow each country or each region to adapt itself to the local sensitivities the broad lines of the spirit of the Assumption. It is not a question of uniformity but to permit the whole of the laity to lean on a clear and common reference.

The **mobilizing works** were the subject of deep attention. They will be reexamined for the General Chapter of 2017. On the subject of the financial files, Father General hopes that the efforts in the management of our goods and the use of our resources continue. Finally he desired that each one return home “with the conviction that our religious life must be reinforced on all levels. We cannot accept mediocrity. The holiness of Father d’Alzon will be all the more evident, if we ourselves accept to live in truth our religious consecration.” He concluded with these words: **“I love my religious family despite its frailties and its insufficiencies. I thank you for loving it also.”**